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ABSTRACT

This paper charts a proposed 15-point plan to move from the present California public school system, devised over 50 years ago, to a system flexible enough to go into the next century. The plan is proposed by Charles S. Terrell, Jr., Ed.D., San Bernardino County superintendent of schools. The 15 points address changes in these areas: (1) class size; (2) teacher-student ratios; (3) management positions; (4) support service personnel; (5) statewide salary and benefits schedules; (6) isolated secondary school staffing formula; (7) block grants; (8) district employees; (9) transfers; (10) statewide collective bargaining; (11) single district for small counties; (12) K-12 unified school districts only; (13) intermediate regional services; (14) better utilization of school facilities; and (15) changing the fiscal year. With the adoption of this plan, and an appropriate phase-in procedure, the critical elements of school policy would be made by those who control the essential resources (the state government) while, at the same time, reestablishing a significant element of local decision-making and responsibility of the local community (the district school board). A brief summary of the 15-point education plan concludes the paper. (SI)

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Toward Local Control of the California Schools in the 1990s: A Fifteen Point Education Plan

CHARLES S. TERRELL, JR., Ed.D.
San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools
March 23, 1988

Not too long ago, it was correct to refer to a school district as an "independent public corporation." Most revenue spent by a board of education was raised from within the district. There were minimal restrictions placed upon a board in the areas of curriculum, graduation requirements, and management of the activities for students.

That is not so today. For a variety of reasons over the past 15 years, an erratic but substantial change has taken place to the point that, today, a board of education has no control over its revenue, and minimum control over its expenditures, and its curriculum, which significantly affects the activities for students.

Without attaching a judgment to the condition, I have now become a strong advocate for a corresponding change in the "rules" of operation. We once said with pride that in California the operation of the public schools was a responsibility of the state and a function of the local school board. Although this is clearly no longer the case, under a new plan of governance some of the critical elements of "local control" can be regained in an era of Serrano, Jarvis and Gann.

There are two steps involved in shaping public policy observable by the public at large. The first is the preparation of the language through public hearings, written documents, legislation session, and media exposure. The second is implementation by administration or executive branches of government. Absent control of fiscal resources, this secondary step is

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moot. Therefore, the legal ability to "fund" policy (a.k.a. programs) is a critical element in a plan prepared to influence management of the public schools.

The following 15-point plan charts a proposed method to move from the present system, devised over fifty years ago, to a public schools system flexible enough to go into the next century. The present system has significantly eroded local control. The key to the future is to capture the last vestige of local control and lock it in to a system that does not continue to reduce the commitment of communities to their schools. Now is the moment to design that system—a system which is consistent with the reality of the new times.

1. Class size: Control language has long been in the education code limiting the maximum number of students in an elementary class through the sixth grade. I propose we review these maximums to determine their appropriateness as a state policy issue. Appropriate student loading for secondary classes also should be determined. At the present time, the average class size in California is very high and in the top one-quarter of the states. We do not want to continue to be in this position. Huge sums of money are required to reduce the size of classes throughout the state. The expense is twofold: personnel and facilities. The solution must be determined by those who control the availability and allocation of tax dollars.

2. Teacher-student ratios: When the maximum size of classes is determined, then costs of certified teachers must be considered. The process should be a simple arithmetic problem. Each district first would estimate the total enrollment for a given year. It would then sum the number of students for each grade, divide by the appropriate class size for each grade, and add up the quotients to determine the number of teachers needed. That figure would be the basis for retaining and hiring teachers for the district.

3. Management positions: School districts would be placed in groups by size. Perhaps eight to 10 groups or classes would be created which would determine the number of management personnel and their salaries. The larger the district, the bigger the staff and the higher the wage authorized for the superintendent and top management. The reverse would be true for smaller districts.

4. Support services personnel: In like manner to a formula for determining the number of teachers for a district, guidelines would be used to allocate support service personnel according to the expected student population. Again, a state organization model could serve as the foundation while recognizing the special needs of districts in highly compacted or sparsely populated regions.

5. Statewide salary and benefits schedules: My experience as a teacher and administrator is that equity in salary and benefits is the number one issue. Comparable compensation for like assignments is critical. Therefore, with a statewide schedule, instant equity is obtained. If costs-of-living influences are significantly different in certain parts of the state or areas are found to be unattractive to personnel, then a factoring system can be imposed. Salaries and benefits would be paid according to a standard schedule applicable throughout the state. The base schedule may not be altered or enhanced by a school district.

6. Isolated secondary school staffing formula: The entire staff would be determined by a formula which should compensate for necessary small high schools. A consideration of the standard state secondary curriculum would expand the staff even if the actual classes were well below the class sixes of metropolitan secondary schools. Therefore, reasonable equity of opportunity would be afforded all students in the state as a policy matter.

7. Block grants: Perhaps the most appealing part of this plan is to make a block grant of funds to boards of education to do what they wish except to raise salaries. This fund should have a great deal of discretion delegated to the local school board (trustees) and would constitute the district's general fund.

As examples, more staffing units could be purchased from the state to reduce class size, or more money could be put into music throughout the district, or a beefed up athletic program could be developed, or more books and materials could be purchased beyond those allocated by the state, or a combination of these and other innovative plans. Many of the present discretionary funded programs designed to meet special needs could be met through use of block

grant funding, but only in those programs not mandated by the state or federal government. Any and all state mandated programs must be funded to match the state program objectives.

8. District employees: Since all certificated and classified personnel work for the district, not the state, regular personnel practices would be continued. This keeps flexibility and sensitivity to regional and local issues at the level closest to the work site. At the same time, there would be a link to a statewide system with other advantages such as staff transfers from one district to another.

9. Transfers: All permanent personnel would be given an opportunity to move from one district to another under controlled conditions. First, a position must be available and offered by the receiving district. If after one year the receiving district decides not to permanently employ, the person must return to the former district or lose his or her tenure.

This aspect of the plan would be particularly attractive to senior teachers and other school employees who are now locked into positions, school districts, and communities because of the severe financial reduction in salary offered to "new" persons in a district regardless of experience.

10. Statewide collective bargaining: All of the provisions of employment would be "bargained" at the state level and become state law. No school district could enter into a separate agreement for wages, benefits, and working conditions adopted by the State Legislature and signed by the Governor ,or for any other provisions not authorized by law.

11. Single district for small counties: Of the 19 counties in California with fewer than 10,000 pupils, six have a single school district. Two of the remaining 13 counties have 28 or more districts. Consideration must be given to geography and to economy of size; however, one administrative organization should be considered in sparsely pupiled counties. At issue here is the strengthening of programs which are better coordinated and make more efficient utilization of personnel and resources.

12. K-12 unified school districts only: This is an extension of the point directed at county-wide school districts. The economy of size applies to school district organizations as

well. School districts should be K-12 unified and not separate school districts divided by grade level. We should have full-service school districts. Having a consistent, articulated curriculum and program from kindergarten through 12th grade clearly is advantageous. The question is not "are we going to join together for unification?" but "with whom do we join?"

13. Intermediate regional services: Transportation, food service, purchasing, payroll processing, staff inservice and training, special instructional services such as infant/preschool programs, programs for severe and profoundly handicapped, programs for children who are deemed to be at risk, and vocational/occupational educational programs are a few examples of the kinds of services which could efficiently and cost-effectively be administered by the intermediate service office. Managing programs and services as discussed in the above example has proven to be very cost effective. These programs are currently provided by county offices of education administered by the county superintendents of schools and county boards of education.

The intermediate service areas should be funded on an equitable basis and could logically be grouped to take in geographical and other factors. Regional service areas may or may not be coterminous with existing county boundaries. In some locations, an area might be created to take in several counties. In other parts of the state, a county with a great number of school districts and students might be served by more than one intermediate service office.

14. Better utilization of school facilities: A multi-track year-round calendar must be in place before the state will finance construction of additional classrooms. I have heard estimates that between $8-15 billion will be needed to finance statewide school construction to meet anticipated enrollment growth in the next decade. My own county, San Bernardino, is growing at a rate among the fastest in the state. I don't say that entire districts must come under the multi-track schedule, but it clearly should involve a substantial number of students where growth is occurring. The point is that we must mitigate costs by making better utilization of existing facilities. Also, the use of year-round calendars becomes a hedge against declining

enrollment periods which might follow in 10 or 15 years. If districts overbuild, declining enrollment will force the closing of schools as was the case in the 1970s.

15. Change fiscal year: October 1 to September 30 should be the calendar for the fiscal year. The start of the fiscal year should be moved from July 1 to October 1. Under the present system, school districts are two months or more into the fiscal year before a final budget is adopted. We should maintain the same academic calendar and keep the same adoption schedule of preliminary budget in June and final budget in September, but shift the fiscal year to recognize the realities of the state budgeting process. Such a move would make planning much more reflective of swings and tilts in funding cycles. Completing budget adoption before the fiscal year begins is to good public policy.

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With adoption of this plan, and following an appropriate phase-in procedure, the critical elements of school policy would be made by those who control the essential resources (state government) while, at the same time, re-establishing a significant element of local decision-making and responsibility of the local community (the district school board).

Truly the management plan developed in the 1930s, refined each year thereafter, seasoned by Serrano, Jarvis, and Gann, is not just out of date, but unmanageable.

It is now time for a new plan to move us into the 21st century.

FIFTEEN POINT EDUCATION PLAN:
TOWARD LOCAL CONTROL OF THE CALIFORNIA SCHOOLS IN THE 1990s

by Charles S. Terrell, Jr., Ed.D.
San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools

- Maximum class size is set as state policy.
- Classroom teaching positions are allocated to each school district according to expected student population.
- Management positions are allocated to each school district according to expected student population.
- Support services personnel are allocated to each school district according to expected student population.
- Salaries and benefits are determined as state policy and paid to each school district according to staff formulas.
- Appropriate staffing is allocated to small secondary schools to insure a balanced curriculum.
- Block grants are made to each school district to be used at discretion of the school board.
- All personnel are employees of the school district.
- Provision for transfer of personnel is made with no financial penalty or salary loss.
- A collectively bargained set of work rules is done at the state level and applied to all school districts.
- Form single school districts in counties with fewer than 10,000 pupils.
- Every district must be a K-12 unified school district.
- Provide intermediate services such as transportation, food service, purchasing, and payroll services within a regional service area not necessarily coterminous with county boundaries
- Put the substantial number of students within a school district on a multi-track year-round schedule before the state builds more classroom space for that district.
- Move the start of the fiscal year from July 1 to October 1 for all school districts. The academic year would remain as it is now.